

The

# NEWSLETTER

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Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Society,  
June 20, 1961.

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"Nineteenth Century Poetry in the Maritimes and  
Problems of Research"

by

Dr. Fred Cogswell,  
University of New Brunswick.



# MINUTES OF THE 1961 ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Bibliographical Society of Canada was held on Tuesday, June 20, 1961, at 8 p.m., in the Verandah Dining Room of the Algonquin Hotel, St. Andrews, New Brunswick, during the Conference of the Canadian Library Association. About sixty persons were present.

The President, Miss Vernon Ross, called the meeting to order and welcomed all members and guests. It was moved by Mr. Harlow and seconded by Mr. Allison that the minutes of the last Annual Meeting be taken as printed in the September 1960 issue of the Newsletter.

The President, in her report, noted that four numbers of the Newsletter had been sent to members during the year and that Dr. Hayne, the editor, was anxious to enlarge the publication. She suggested that members should send in as many contributions as possible in the way of bibliographical news, notes, or short articles, as well as any suggestions. Miss Ross referred to Miss Marie Tremaine's paper given at the last Annual Meeting in Montreal and said that we hoped to publish this in the near future. A portion of a letter from Miss Tremaine was read in which she explained the delay as follows: "As for the paper, I can't give you anything further than the last time. We are still working on organizational phases which I want to cover when I finally write up the planning and operation of this bibliographic project. I don't know when that will be, but I will submit the paper first to B.S. of C. of course."

The President also spoke regarding a possible supplement to the Bibliography of Canadian Bibliographies. She mentioned that a short list had been published in the March Newsletter and that it was proposed that this be done once a year until such time as we might have sufficient material to print a proper supplement in format similar to the basic volume. Dr. Tanghe had very kindly undertaken the responsibility for these supplements.

Miss Ross reported a total membership of 160 - one life member, forty-two institutional members and one hundred and seventeen individual members. It was planned that a special drive be undertaken this year to increase this number and Miss Ross suggested that anyone present, who would like to join, do so after the meeting.

The Secretary-Treasurer then read the Treasurer's report, in which she noted a balance in the general account of \$807.86 and in the B.C.B. account of \$169.98. It was moved by Mrs. Jacobsen and seconded by Mr. Watt that these reports be adopted. Carried.

Miss Gladys Shepley presented the following report of the Nominating Committee:

Honorary President	Dr. Lorne Pierce
President:	Miss Vernon Ross
1st Vice-President	Mr. Willard Ireland
2nd Vice-President:	Miss Marion E. Brown
Secretary-Treasurer:	Mrs. R.C. Jacobsen



Associate Secretary:	Mr. Claude B. Aubry
Council Members,	Mrs. Isabelle Skelly
1961-1964	Mr. Robert Blackburn

Continuing on Council:	Dr. Raymond Tanghe, Past President
	Dr. David M. Hayne - to 1963
	Dr. Samuel Rothstein - to 1963
	Mr. T.R. McCloy - to 1962
	Miss Martha Shepard - to 1962
	Mr. David W. Foley, Chairman,
	Publications Committee.

Submitted by Juliette Chabot, Robert Rogers and Gladys Shepley, Chairman. It was moved by Father Morisset and seconded by Miss Grace Lewis that this report be adopted. There being no further nominations, the motion was carried.

Mr. Laurie Allison then introduced the speaker, Dr. Fred Cogswell, as a Canadian poet, teacher, editor and friend of Canadian literature. He mentioned that Dr. Cogswell was a native son of New Brunswick and a graduate of the University of New Brunswick; that he had published several volumes of poetry and the Chapbook Series and was poetry editor of The Fiddlehead. Dr. Cogswell is now doing research on "Literature in the Maritime Provinces from 1825 to 1880" for the Literary History of Canada.

Dr. Cogswell then spoke to the Society on "Nineteenth Century Poetry in the Maritimes and Problems of Research". (The text of Dr. Cogswell's paper appears in a later section of this Newsletter.)

Mr. Lochhead thanked Dr. Cogswell for his most interesting address, congratulating him first on reading sixty Nova Scotian and New Brunswick poets. However, he felt that, taxing as the job had been, it had also been fun and that we would look forward to the publication of the Literary History of Canada. Mr. Lochhead felt that it was reasonable to think that a collection of the poems gathered would see the light at some future date. Dr. Cogswell then answered several questions put by the audience, such as the possibility of there being also hidden Ontario poets, and how he had discovered these Maritime poets.

Miss Ross, before closing the meeting, thanked Dr. Lorne Pierce for his helpful advice and kind support and Mrs. Jacobsen for her great interest, vigilance and diligence in the affairs of the Society. Miss Ross also expressed her thanks to Dr. Hayne for all the work he had done in connection with the Newsletter and to Dr. Tanghe for his watchfulness over B.C.B., and to all other members of the Council for their contribution to the welfare of the Society.

After Miss Ross had welcomed the new members of the Council for 1961-1962, the meeting was adjourned at 9.35 p.m.

Vernon Ross,  
President.

Esther Jacobsen,  
Secretary-Treasurer.

ATLANTIC PROVINCES CHECKLIST

Volume 4 (January-December 1960) of the Atlantic Provinces Checklist has now appeared. Compiled and edited by members of the Atlantic Provinces Library Association, the Checklist is published and distributed by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, 205 South Park Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Price \$1.00.



NINETEENTH CENTURY POETRY IN THE MARITIMES AND PROBLEMS  
OF RESEARCH

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About four years ago, Professor C.F. Klinck organized a Literary History of Canada, to be the joint work of several scholars. Areas of research were allotted and summer grants made available through the Canada Council. I was assigned "Literature in the Maritime Provinces from 1825 to 1880."

If the poetry I was called upon to deal with included only that contained in our standard twentieth-century anthologies dealing with the period, or even if I read only the works of those poets mentioned in the latest handbooks of Canadian literature, I would have had very little to do indeed. The official canon of poetry in the Maritime provinces for the period between 1825 and 1880--the date of publication of Sir Charles G.D. Roberts' Orion--consists of the works of Joseph Howe and Oliver Goldsmith in the 1820's and 1830's, and those of James DeMille and John Hunter Duvar in the 1870's and 1880's.

When I looked at the quantity of work produced in poetry in the Maritime provinces during that period, I found an amazingly different picture. I was overwhelmed by the amount and variety of verse to be found in newspaper, magazine, and book publication.

The publishing of poetry in book form in the Maritimes flourished throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Halifax published 60 book titles of verse over a period of 50 years; Saint John had 23. In all, 140 titles by 91 different Maritime poets were published during the period under survey. One hundred and eight books of verse were actually printed within the Maritime provinces. A few local books even went through second editions. These works showed a great variation in theme and in quality of execution--a variation often perceptible within a single volume.

After having read about 80 titles, I now conclude that Howe, Goldsmith, DeMille, and Duvar are not mountain peaks or even plateaus but only four among many contemporaries who wrote with equal skill and often greater relevance. For example, A Lay of the Wilderness by "A Native of New Brunswick", published in Saint John in 1833, is no worse technically (it could hardly be) than Oliver Goldsmith's "The Rising Village" and is far superior in realism. Alexander Rae Garvie, A.D. MacNeill, and William Murdoch are intellectually equal and poetically superior to Joseph Howe, and the work of Peter John Allan, who died at Fredericton in 1848 at the age of 23, shows equal ability in execution and far greater promise than the work of John Hunter Duvar.

About one-third of the volumes published can be discarded as the doggerel of semi-literate cranks. The remaining two-thirds are the work of well educated professional men--clergymen, doctors, lawyers, and journalists--and women with leisure time. All these had studied contemporary British and American poetry and used it as a model for their own work--work, incidentally, which often pertained to the writer's Maritime background and peculiarly local problems and interests. Much of this work is as skilfully



constructed, as relevant to the concerns of local society, as Roberts' Orion.

A few examples will illustrate both the technical ability of, and the literary influences impinging upon, little known Maritime poets. For example, A.K. Archibald in his Poems, published in Boston in 1848, skilfully adapts the ottava rima of Lord Byron's Don Juan to purposes of local satire. Witness this extract from "Angela":

Her dress was silk, of course, and very fine,  
And new, and made in the first fashion then  
Afloat; 'twas said, 'the sleeves imply design,  
Twelve yards of silk, she thinks, will please the men;  
But they were wrong; perhaps there might be nine,  
Or thereabouts, I'm sure not more than ten  
Contained in both the sleeves, including bows,  
Puffs, pipes, carved-work, and taps, and furbelows.

Now reader, think yourself in some vast wild,  
And that a lovely spot had caught your eye,  
Where lilies, roses and carnations piled  
Profusely, yet arranged in order high,  
Stood blushing fair, and that the sight beguiled  
If not a tear, a something like a sigh;  
Then of her head-dress you've a passing view,  
And the effect produced was like it too.

Nine years earlier, Arthur Sladen had published The Conflagration in Saint John. This poem is memorable for its author's individual variation upon Byron's ottava rima--a variation having all the advantages of rhyming surprise that ottava rima possessed, plus the added virtue of being faster moving and hence more suited to narrative.

And certainly, 'tis startling--when you know  
A little time may bring the flames to bear  
On your own mansion, ten doors off or so,  
At greater distance or perhaps more near,  
Just as it happens--surely 'tis appalling  
When torchlike brands upon your roof are falling;  
When fire, as thick as snow-flakes, falls around one,  
'Tis quite enough, I take it, to confound one.

Forth from their gloomy vaults roll pipes of wine,  
With puncheons, their comates in 'durance vile'--  
Their prisonhouse no longer can enshrine  
These rare deposits--men in 'rank and file'  
Are rolling from the fury that's approaching  
What some, perhaps, imagin'd worth the broaching;  
Barrels, and all the hoop-bound brotherhood  
Were mix'd pell mell, the worthless with the good...



Bales, boxes, bundles, beautiful displays  
 Of human skill to deck the beauteous fair;  
 (Sorts without number in these modish days)  
 With piles of coarser and more ponderous ware,  
 Obstruct the way--books, bonnets, mantles, muffs,  
 Bandboxes, butter, heterogenous stuffs--  
 With fancy ornaments of gilt and glitter,  
 Magnificently mingled in a litter....

In all secondary school and university education, the classics held an honoured place in the Maritime provinces throughout the nineteenth century. It is therefore not surprising to find that translation played a prominent part in local verse. William Blowers Bliss published an entire volume of translations into English from the Greek and Latin classics. Silas Tertius Rand carried the opposite process to an extreme of absurdity, translating evangelical hymns of the Baptist church into rhyming Latin verse. Moses Hardy Nickerson's attempt to adapt Horace's "Epode II" to a "homespun" Nova Scotian setting is perhaps the most original:

How blest, remote from business strife,  
 Is he who leads a quiet life,  
 As did our sires--the happy dwellers  
 In cots with large potato cellars,--  
 Entirely free from all the din  
 Of this eternal age of tin!  
 No fire-alarms disturb his sleep--  
 He has no venture on the deep;  
 The midnight storm without may roar,  
 And hurl huge breakers on the shore,  
 They cannot even drown his snore!

The air he breathes is free from taint!  
 He lives unknown to pride's restraint.  
 He wisely shuns the courts of law  
 As he would shun the tiger's paw.  
 He has no money to invest,  
 So never has a hollow chest;--  
 He melts not down o'er cards and wine,  
 Nor heeds if shares and stocks decline.  
 With limbs inured to honest toil,  
 He cultivates paternal soil,  
 And many a busy hour devotes  
 To barley, turnips, beans, and oats,  
 And sees his broad fields sprinkled over  
 And blushing ripe with scented clover.

Allied to translating the classics is imitation of them. Many an epigram, many a satire was produced by Maritime poets. For example, A.D. MacNeill's "Free Will":

Yes, man is bold and free, and yet, somehow,  
 A something, not himself his free-will sways,  
 Like as the river from the mountain's brow  
 Flows freely, while the valleys shape its ways.



I have only time for two of the many epigrams of superior quality written by Matthew Richey Knight of Boiestown, New Brunswick. These are:

Although through all the round  
Of faces fair, love ran,  
Nothing more fair he found  
But ends where he began.

and,

When sin is yet a babe  
Satan supports his own;  
When sin becomes a man,  
Then he can walk alone.

More pungent, if less poetic, is Moses Nickerson's "A Burning Question":

In all good faith and sobriety,  
You often have asked me to tell  
What would become of society  
Were it not for hell.

Perhaps you would do as well  
To ponder, by way of variety,  
What would become of hell  
Were it not for society?

In general and personal satire longer than the epigram, there are plenty of examples, notably in the work of John LePage, Andrew Shiels, William and Robert Murdoch, and Moses Nickerson. Andrew Shiels, a Cape Breton blacksmith, expressed himself in pungent couplets about the political corruption of Sir John A. Macdonald's cabinet:

We do not know, it is not easily known,  
How much dishonour must be gulped down,  
Before a candidate for place is fit--  
In the Dominion Cabinet to sit?  
How much pollution of a pious kind  
With patriotism is to be entwined?  
Or base a reputation should be e'er  
It may the title 'Honourable' bear?  
No, that is quite beyond the poet's skill,  
But Ottawa could answer if it will....

Moses Hardy Nickerson pilloried a local worthy in the Shelburne County Militia as follows:

'Tis the day of the drill and the ranks soon fill  
With the very flower of the nation.  
But the bloodless plain for this campaign  
Is somebody's turnip plantation.



But look at the man who leads the van,  
 An object to cause reflections;  
 He is major-in-chief by right of a leaf  
 Which he got from the book of directions.

He shows more skill in militia drill  
 Than in other departments of labor;  
 Though his hands were made for wielding the spade  
 Or anything else but a sabre!

Yet when he is clad in warlike red  
 With a borrowed horse to ride on,  
 He would easily pass--as did the ass  
 That put the lion's hide on.

More prevalent even than the classical influence in the Maritime provinces during the nineteenth century was the influence of romanticism. Maritime poets practised romanticism not as an organic growth imposed from within but as a convention with which to decorate aesthetic passages and to dignify moral ones. In the handling of verse forms, in the individual line, they are not deficient. If in no way original, the following stanzas by the New Brunswick poet, Amos Chandler, are dignified and skilfully constructed:

God's wondrous work around the cyclic span  
 Of far-off ages, beyond farthest time,  
 Shall be eternal as they've been sublime:  
 Nature is but the archetype of man,  
 Convulsed and changing as the human heart;  
 With cloud and sunshine on her brow, by turns;  
 With calm and tempest, forming there a part  
 Of her existence: in her bosom burns  
 The self-same lamp of immortality;  
 As leaf from branch; as acorn from the tree;  
 As flower from the parent stem are we  
 A part of her--aye, from her loins are cast--  
 Like to a mother's, we cling tenderly  
 Unto her side; and, even in death, sleep on her breast at last.

All nature weeps, for over the fair land  
 Death's icy fingers have been spread, alas!  
 All nature weeps, for every blade of grass,  
 And leaf, and flower--from great Ocean's strand  
 Far back to groves behind the ancient hills--  
 Low-stricken lie upon the heart of earth.  
 No longer now the voice of Summer fills  
 The welkin with her clear harmonious mirth.  
 Lo, Winter! snow-crowned, from the wild north skies  
 The storm-king comes--swift as an eagle flies,  
 By dark gales borne-- and, like a great sea-wall,  
 Dark rolling clouds, black as a funeral pall,  
 Enwrap his form: Hark! from the mountains he  
 The death-curse shouts, till echoes back Spring Immortality!



In this last stanza, one sees the ghost of Shelley being given something like a local habitation and a home. Only a Maritimer could have linked the storm with the image of "the great sea-wall".

A.D. MacNeil of Orangedale, Nova Scotia, makes skilful use of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" metre in his poem "Evolution":

...And who, that saw a tiny seed  
Unfolding to a tree or fern,  
Can find it difficult to learn  
The great but from the less proceed.

Asleep a thousand silent years  
The life within the seed may hide;  
But heat and moisture once supplied  
A leafy stem it quickly rears: ...

through plants, reptiles, and mammals, MacNeil traces the evolutionary process to its climax, a man-like ape:

And last in Evolution's plan,  
The noblest, wisest, and the best,  
The joint production of the rest,  
The peerless form divine of man,

Who ages past the desert trod  
A hairy ape, alert and quick  
Well versed in every monkey-trick,  
Nor dreamt of angel or of God; ...

The "ape's progress" via social and environmental circumstances is then detailed until:

Unfolding thus in Nature's plan  
Increased the subtle simian mind,  
Until completed and refined  
We lose the monkey in the man.

These verses give the lie to the myth of cultural lag insofar as it applies to the educated people in the Maritime provinces throughout the nineteenth century. Moses Nickerson was quick to comment in verse on any outstanding political or literary event in Europe, and newspaper editors were quick to publish his comments. Knight mourned the death of Thomas Carlyle in verses that both exemplify Carlyle's own mannerisms and justly assess his worth; Knight, moreover, paid eloquent tribute to W. T. Stead, at the time of his imprisonment --a tribute as broad-minded and unparochial as it was Christian.

Finally, to illustrate the technical competence and urbanity of Maritime poetry of "literary" inspiration, I shall give two quotations from the work of the youthful John Peter Allan. The first is in Spenserian stanzas and is part of an "Apostrophe to Lord Byron":



Thou glorious painter of the thoughts that dwell  
 In the hot brain of genius, it was thine  
 To live in the delusion of a spell,  
 To delve into the demon-haunted mine  
 Of a forbidden region, and to twine  
 The brightest laurels with the cypress leaves,  
 Half-turned aside from love and hope divine  
 By the sharp sting of appetite that weaves  
 The heartstrings in its pangs, like tares amid the sheaves.

Thy heart was a volcano, which did cast  
 Its lava forth continually o'er all  
 The fruitful themes of memory, till at last  
 An awestruck world beheld the poet fall  
 In ruins, where he stood to disenthral  
 The prostrate Greek; but an unwasting tomb  
 Is thine, O Byron! Honour is thy pall!  
 A halo fame has shed around thy gloom,  
 And the most Merciful has fixed thy final doom...

As a specimen of Allan's blank verse, I give you this brief extract from  
 "A Dream of Destruction":

...And I saw a lovely girl,  
 Beautiful as the dying glance of day,  
 Kneel to her lover,--one whose warrior heart  
 Had never stoop'd to love but once; and now  
 Disease had wound him in her scaly folds,  
 And breathed her poisonous breathings into him...  
 And now, fierce o'er his heart had come the flame  
 Of wild delirium; and he rav'd, and strove  
 To tear the dry white flesh off his bones,  
 Grinning with clenched teeth, and cursing life,  
 And her who had been more than life to him--  
 That patient one, who kissed away the drops  
 Of anguish from his burning forehead...

At least two thirds of the books of poetry published in the Maritime provinces between 1825 and 1880 are permeated with religious and moral content and attitudes. These may be divided into three categories: religious satire; stories in verse, using both story and verse as an excuse to introduce moral and religious reflection; and religious lyrics and hymns.

The best religious satire occurs in the poems of James Arminius Richey, a stout-hearted Anglican beleaguered by Baptist and Methodist "wolves" who assailed his flock, and in the work of the anonymous author of No sect in Heaven, published in Saint John in 1868. In this satire, the author envisages members of various Maritime religious denominations gathered together on the near side of Jordan, awaiting the final crossing. Each speculates on the demerits of his neighbour's sect and the merits of his own. The satirist concludes with the voice of a tolerant common sense:



I watched them long in my curious dream,  
 Till they stood by the borders of the stream,  
 Then, just as I thought, the two ways met,  
 But all the brethren were talking yet,  
 And would talk on, till the heaving tide  
 Carried them over, side by side;  
 Side by side, for the way was one,  
 The toilsome journey of life was done,  
 And Priest and Quaker, and all who died,  
 Came out alike on the other side.

No forms, "or crosses", or books had they,  
 No gowns of silk, nor suits of grey,  
 No creeds to guide them, nor MSS.,  
 For all had put on Christ's righteousness.

The narratives incorporating religious controversy and moral preaching, though often good in particulars, are failures as literature--in almost every case because the author failed to keep the balance between his own particular views and the probability that life might be ordered otherwise.

Of religious lyrics, several successful hymns originated in the Maritime provinces, one of the most notable being "From Ocean to Ocean" by the Reverend Robert Murray. Space allows me to give only what I feel to be one of the more successful complex religious lyrics, Alexander Rae Garvie's sonnet:

Best of all trees I love the stately sombre pines,  
 For in their solemn fugue tremendous truths I hear,  
 A creeping wind but toys with trembling ferns and vines;  
 The wide storms spurning Earth sweep through the ether clear,  
 And to the ancient pines while passing by, they cry--  
 Utter our message unto man! though he may rear  
 Brave towers, yet as old Babel they will ruined lie,  
 But our Creator's steadfast city is on high,  
 Where such as overcome on earth accept their crowns!  
 Thus doth my soul receive wind's words whenever I  
 Like reed bow down; with cadence deep, faint doubt it drowns  
 And in the tossing wood the prophet pines proclaim  
 The dreadful nature of His Hebrew name.

In light verse, in which subject is totally subordinate to technical dexterity, Maritime nineteenth century poets produced good work. James DeMille's "Sweet Maid of Passamaquoddy" is a classic of its kind--a less well-known work of similar character is Richard Huntingdon's "The Memory of the Red Man". More sophisticated light verse is that of Moses Nickerson's mockingly ironic description of the burning of old love letters, "The Holocaust":

Those letters, innocently bold  
 In all their tender yearning,  
 Must now be tried like virgin gold;  
 Yea, let this mass of wealth untold  
 Be purified by burning.



There lies the substance and the sum  
 Of deathless love recorded!  
 'Tis not the first time faith has come  
 From lock and key to martyrdom  
 And gone to get rewarded.

Its body in the fire must die  
 Without a drop to quench it.  
 The flame must riot red and high;  
 The tear founts' rather scant supply  
 Can lend no aid to quench it.

That sweet, confiding, melting style,  
 Oh, how I once enjoyed it!  
 Now, as I light the funeral pile  
 It would be sacrilege to smile,  
 Yet how can I avoid it!

The smile which I cannot control  
 Is less profane than stupid.  
 It issues from an honest soul  
 That sees its incense upward roll  
 As nonsense burned to Cupid.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust!  
 And now my heart is lighter.  
 Did not those traitorous scrolls combust,  
 They might someday betray my trust,  
 As did their pretty writer!

The illustrations I have given indicate that Maritime poets from 1825 to 1880 were accomplished verse-writers with a fair degree of education, with moral earnestness, and at times with a sense of humour. It must be confessed, however, that very seldom did they succeed in achieving satisfactory poetry. To one brought up on the great English poets, their work possesses real shortcomings.

Many of their defects stem from their very virtues as writers. They wrote in straightforward sentences and clear-cut diction with little strain in the finding of unusual images or phrases. They did so because their thought was limited. The world of morals and of aesthetics in which they lived was a black and white world--whichever colour they accepted. What is most characteristic in their work is the absolute certainty of each writer as to the truth of what he or she is stating. Such certainty invariably produces rhetoric rather than poetry. Rhetoric is more susceptible to changes in taste than poetry, and on this account Maritime poetry of the nineteenth century has suffered greatly in our own time.

When one is certain of the truth, one does not strain one's imagination to find fresh images or phrases for it--the readiest and least suggestive of ambiguity is the best. As a result, we in the twentieth century envy Maritime poets of the nineteenth century their clear-cut convictions, but we find their blacks and whites too simple colourings for our tastes, and we are apt to dismiss their work, however competent it is, as shallow and commonplace--certainly much too shallow and commonplace for the complex world of our own time.



A second impression given by a reading of Maritime poets is the uniformity of treatment and technique--a dominance of the impersonality of a convention that has been so completely accepted that it dominates its authors. Based on the literary concept of using poetic language to point a moral or decorate a beautiful theme, the poems of any number of Maritime poets could be written by any number of other Maritime poets of comparable skill influenced by the same literary models. Only occasionally does one note with pleasure a sharply realized personal idiom--notably in the poems of Alexander Fleming Little of Truro, Nova Scotia, whose poems published in 1880 evidently immediately preceded the premature death of their young author from tuberculosis.

Maritime poetry, then, in the nineteenth century before Roberts, was rhetoric--public poetry written for a cultivated audience of readers who knew what to expect in verse and who were satisfied when they got what they expected. Longfellow is the supreme example of the kind of excellence that suited them. Almost always, however, Maritime poets failed where Longfellow succeeded. They failed because they cared too greatly about the moral and theological problems that their society had yet to solve--problems which demanded a more subtle and complex form of expression than what was considered in the England and America of their day to be the best suited for poetry. On this account, their work is uneven and incongruous, just as Tennyson and Emerson are uneven and incongruous when they attempt to wrestle with problems beyond the limits of the form they have allowed themselves. It is no accident that Maritime nineteenth century poetry is best in verse on purely decorative themes and in light verse, and that it fails most signally when it attempts to tackle the moral and religious problems that beset its society.

What caused the tension that Maritime poets of the nineteenth century never satisfactorily resolved? The answer lies in an extreme puritanism--a puritanism engendered as a result of a recoil from the excesses of frontier life and kept alive by the emotional pressure of a Baptist church born of those excesses. Founded by Henry Alline, himself a poet, one wing of the Baptist church captured a segment of Halifax intellectuals headed by Edmund Crawley, and with the founding of Horton Academy (later Acadia University) in 1828, this religion acquired and maintained a position in the intellectual life of the Maritimes that impinged upon the views of its rivals, Presbyterians, Methodists, and even Anglicans. Its strongest manifestation by mid-century was the temperance movement which by that time had become inter-denominational in scope. The result of expressing temperance polemics in literary forms used by the Victorian heirs of romanticism for balanced statements of conventional truths and for decoration was incongruity, bathos, and sentimentality. A good example is the following stanzas from Vesper Chimes, by Phoebe Mills, published in Halifax in 1872:

...Alas for all her glowing dreams,  
Her new-found joys where are they now?  
Upon her cheek shame's hectic gleams,  
A hot flush mantles o'er her brow.  
What is it rends her feelings so?  
What is it wounds her woman's pride?  
Ah, she has learned the truth to know,  
She is a moderate drinker's bride...



When one considers the drinking habits of our Maritime ancestors, the last line was not nearly so anti-climactic in 1872 as it is today.

Many Maritime poets, particularly Nova Scotians, reached similar nadirs of incongruity. The sublime occurs in the work of a man who had the capacity to become a true poet. S.C. Fulton published in Amherst, N.S., in 1873, Red Tarn, or the Vision of the Lake; a Thrilling Temperance Poem in Fourteen Cantos. In this poem, the poet's horror of alcohol stimulates him to Miltonic vision of a hellish lake:

The shores, not pebble-strewn and white with shells,  
But of unearthly shades, uncouthly mixed,--  
A mottled coast, and strangely demon-like;  
And darkly drooping flags were growing there,  
Hung with filthy tufts washed from the slimy rocks--  
The rocks of Tarn. And, darting here and there,  
Down in the dreadful deep, were serpents huge  
With deadly stings; and hydra-monsters, too,  
Their glaring eyes would show, and open wide  
Their horrid jaws; and ever and anon,  
A conflict would ensue,--the lake would foam  
And surge for miles away,--the reptiles all  
At war--when blood and poison, mingling, flowed!

Over the lake hung clouds, and the clouds are significantly symbolic:

And clouds hung o'er of weirdly wizard shape;--  
And some, like sulphur waves by tempest lashed;  
Others, like ragged reeling hosts at war;  
Others, like widow trains and orphan bands,  
Wailing for their lost: And some were varied,  
Made of divers goods and broken fragments;--  
Tears crystallized, and set in cherub's eyes;  
And broken skulls and broken human hearts!  
There were others, bold, distinct, and lurid,  
Like barren islands standing out in hell,  
Where helpless wives and frantic husbands, lost,  
Seemed stretching out their arms and hands for help;--  
But, over all, the lowering blood-red mist!

Few would question the power with which Fulton conjures up his symbolic vision of the environment of the alcoholically damned. Imagination has been wedded to morality in a manner undreamed of by the author of "The Moderate Drinker's Bride". But even in Fulton the congruity between theme and form very soon breaks down. Witness the following passage a few pages farther on in Red Tarn:

...Legislators, rise!  
Strike for full freedom and immortal fame,  
Hear the land call for Prohibition! Heed!  
Till this earth--perchance, first fallen, first arise!  
Then, highest name--a Nova Scotian.



In the light of the foregoing illustrations, which are typical of a large mass of published poetry in the Maritimes, I cannot accept Ray Palmer Baker's statement that "However greatly Puritanism has since affected religious, social, and civic institutions, it is little more than an incident in the evolution of Canadian literature." The positive attitude engendered toward social morality by the supporters and opponents of puritanism contributed more than any other single factor to the failure of nineteenth century poetry in the Maritimes before Roberts. It gave both too extreme convictions and too great certainty of rightness, leading poets to overvalue content and to undervalue form of expression in verse. Where certainties are available, the imagination is not greatly stimulated, and the current poetic form required imaginative ability of a high order to redeem it from conventionality.

Why then did Roberts and Carman escape from the conventionality or the incongruity which vitiated the work of their predecessors? The early Roberts was as derivative as his predecessors; he was no better educated and no better equipped technically than at least a dozen poets who had written in the preceding half-century; the environment of Fredericton could be duplicated culturally in such places as Windsor, Nova Scotia, Wolfville, and Halifax.

The answer to Roberts' success lies, I believe, in a lucky accident: the change in the climate of literature in Great Britain simultaneous with an easing of the pressure of puritanism. The rise in Wolfville of John Federic Herbin, a poet of equal merit to Roberts in the poem of regional description, shows that Roberts' achievement was not altogether an isolated act of genius.

Through George Parkin, Roberts came into enthusiastic contact with the pre-Raphaelite movement in British poetry. This movement--essentially a form of word-painting--forced the poet from direct statement of moral and religious themes to indirect expression, using the landscape as a correlative. Form thus removed from the pressure of direct emotional expression demanded more concentration upon the correlative and less upon the theme which called it forth. At the very time that imagination was called for, emotional control was made easier. Moreover, the Canadian landscape was even better fitted than the English for the kind of effects which pre-Raphaelitism demanded. Here at last was a literary tradition that did not give an opportunity for the unresolved problems of Maritime society to vitiate its poetry. At the same time as this literary revolution occurred, the problems of puritanism became less acute. A generation after the entrance of the Maritimes into Confederation, there was greater economic hope, more social stability, and an increasing number of channels other than drink and sex into which Maritimers might channel their activities. The consequence was the rise in the Maritimes of a literary movement that affected Canada as a whole. A rise made possible largely because poets like those whose work I have quoted had popularized and made respectable the craft of verse-making in the Maritimes. Had Roberts, Carman, Herbin, or Sherman lived a generation earlier, it is hard to see how they could have bettered the work of Peter John Allan, Alexander Rae Garvie, or Alexander Fleming Little, men their intellectual equals and as devoted to poetry as they.

I have dwelt at considerable length on little-known Maritime poets. Out of this survey certain problems of interest to bibliographers emerge. Why have Canadian anthologists and literary critics in the twentieth century neglected



the poets I have mentioned? The admitted mediocrity of their work can be no answer as these critics and anthologists have bestowed a good deal of attention upon Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Sangster, and Charles Heavyside--as mediocre poets as can be found in the history of any nation. The answer lies partly in the colonialism of the critics and anthologists and partly in the lack of availability of the books of authors of a purely local reputation, and of information about them; in other words, in the state of Canadian research facilities at present.

Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Sangster, and Charles Heavyside were fortunate enough to have received favourable reviews from reputable British and American periodicals at the time when their works were published; the poets I have mentioned were ignored abroad. Such factors in Canadian academic circles are still sufficient to establish a canon.

There is no complete list in existence of nineteenth century poetry titles by Maritime authors. Within a few months of undertaking research, I found in Nova Scotia alone more than twenty titles not mentioned in the R. E. Watters' Checklist. Even when the existence of a book is known, it is not often easy of access. There is no comprehensive central library in Canada where research can be conducted with a reasonable degree of thoroughness although the Dominion Archives is aiming to become such a centre. As a result, the researcher is compelled to move from place to place or to procure endless volumes through inter-library loan. All this requires time and expense--time and expense often not justified after the book has been procured and found to contain, as often happens, nothing that can add to one's knowledge of the period.

The neglect of nineteenth century Maritime poets who enjoyed a purely local reputation has led to the means of finding out relevant personal details of their lives becoming more and more difficult. Data still exist, buried in the files of local newspapers, and obituaries provide excellent clues to recovery. Unfortunately, few libraries have indexed obituary notices, and it is necessary for the researcher to conduct the time-consuming and baffling search of files to establish even such simple matters as the dates of authors' deaths. A great deal more elementary research needs to be done before anything like an adequate estimate of the role of the literature in the life of the people of the Maritimes can be assessed.

Is the work of finding nineteenth century Maritime poets and of bringing their work to critical attention important? Why not be content with the limited canon preserved at present? Why multiply mediocrity? Why gather, in microfilm or some other form, all Canadian books ever printed into one place? Why index the obituaries of men and women whose reputations never travelled more than two hundred miles from their birthplace?

The answer to these questions lies entirely in the intrinsic value which Canadians are willing to place upon learning the truth about their origins. I feel that distasteful therapy, that a full knowledge of one's past is necessary to enable us to understand and estimate literary achievement. A faulty knowledge of one's past is apt to lead to error, regardless of the intelligence which is applied to it. A. G. Bailey's "Creative Moments in the Culture of the Maritime Provinces" is a brilliant bit of deduction from the facts at Professor Bailey's disposal and has been an extremely influential essay in the history of Canadian literary criticism.



Desmond Pacey's Creative Writing in Canada and Wilfred Eggleston's The Frontier in Canadian Literature are acknowledgedly indebted to it. Yet in the light of what I have discovered, I feel that this thesis requires modification.

Bailey believes that when people are organized into new communities, the new social and cultural patterns formed develop stresses and tensions which become ultimately resolved by creative efforts which transcend them and bring into being something completely new. The transcending solution can come from within the society itself and/or from without. He applies this thesis to the Nova Scotia of the 1830's and to the New Brunswick of the 1880's.

According to Bailey, the first flowering of literature in the Maritimes was in the work of Howe and Haliburton in Nova Scotia in the 1830's. This movement was political because the early Nova Scotian tensions were political. After Howe and Haliburton and after the granting of responsible government, Nova Scotians ceased to be creative literarily and Nova Scotia dropped out of the literary scene.

What this thesis ignores is that Howe and Haliburton in their religious attitude were atypical Nova Scotians; consequently the impingement of Puritanism upon their work is minimal. Literature in Nova Scotia, as I have shown, did not cease with Howe and Haliburton; it only ceased to gain a reputation abroad. Religious and moral problems, as acute and unsettling as the political, remained to plague the writers and failed to produce a comparable creative flowering, although a great many more words were expended upon them than were ever written about Nova Scotian politics.

Professor Bailey regards Nova Scotia as one literary unit and New Brunswick as another. He explains that on account of its later origins, the greater difficulty of internal communication, the effect of the timber trade, and the development of two New Brunswick metropolitan centres, New Brunswick was fifty years later than Nova Scotia in developing a comparable literary movement. By that time, the chief tensions were not political but cultural --hence Roberts and Carman.

This theory is ingenious and attractive, but literature in the Maritimes throughout the nineteenth century was one unit rather than two. Writers in both provinces published at each other's metropolitan centres; very often they moved from one province to another. Readers read newspapers, magazines, and books produced in both provinces; nor is there any difference in over-all literary quality in the production of New Brunswick and Nova Scotian poets throughout the greater part of the century.

Bailey's thesis ignores the moral and religious ferment of the Maritime provinces, the slackening of which was necessary before significant poetry could be developed; nor does it give sufficient weight to the derivative nature of Roberts' early work. I feel that the rise of pre-Raphaelitism in England more than any other factor caused the poetic seed so abundantly sown throughout the century to come to its flowering in the 1880's, and that the accidental presence of Parkin in Fredericton rather than in Windsor or Wolfville led to Roberts' becoming the first of several blooms.



The foregoing is only a tentative study of a subject on which a great deal more research is to be done, but it does suggest that our anthologies and literary histories do not give a true picture of the intellectual life of the Maritimes in the nineteenth century, and that a great deal more research is necessary before anything like the truth about our past will be known. In that truth, I predict the local poets who flourished in the Maritimes from 1825 to 1880 will play a modest but significant role.

Fred Cogswell .